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**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BUYER
PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON
PAY AND RETIREMENT REFORM PROPOSALS**

This morning the Subcommittee on Military Personnel will continue to examine military retention issues with our second hearing in a series of three. Today we will focus on the pay and retirement proposals being offered by DOD in the fiscal year 2000 budget and by the Senate in their bill S. 4, The Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen's and Marines' Bill of Rights Act of 1999. On March 4 the Subcommittee will conduct a hearing on aviator retention.

On Monday of this week, the Subcommittee, during a field hearing at Naval Station Norfolk, heard directly from the true retention experts, the men and women serving in uniform and their families. As expected, it was a rewarding and productive session—I am never disappointed when given the opportunity to talk with our outstanding service members. I always learn a great deal and get much needed adjustments to my “sight picture”—I think the spouses were particularly effective at altering my perspective on issues.

We confirmed several things that we believed to be true:

1. People in the military know there is a retention problem and we ignore it at our peril.
2. The decision to stay in the military for a career is a very complex family decision involving a wide range of factors—some pushing people out of the service, some pulling people out of the service.
3. Military people are working very hard—family separation occurs at home station and not just when deployed.
4. Military pay levels are not competitive—particularly when the private sector is producing high paying jobs.

We also learned about attitudes within the force that cause us concern:

1. The pay and retirement proposals offered by DOD and the Senate are not “silver bullets” that will solve the retention problem—there is a risk that once we spend the money to implement all

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those proposals, we will likely still be confronted with lagging retention that continues to degrade readiness.

2. The people in the military have a very good idea about what programs and benefits they find attractive, and that list is not necessarily the same as what is being proposed.

Our objective today is to gain insight into the scope and causes of the retention problem. Once armed with a better understanding of the problem, we will be able to more intelligently judge the solutions that have been proposed and explore the other options that may be available to fix retention in the most effective and cost efficient manner possible.

We will hear a wide range of perspectives from all sides of the retention debate. Calls for immediate passage of the DOD or Senate proposal will be balanced by calls for caution and more study of other solutions that some believe are more effective. I would ask my colleagues to keep an open mind and gather the information that we will need to craft a effective and cost efficient solution that this Subcommittee can take to the floor of the House with confidence.

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